

The Hitler émigrés: the cultural impact on Britain of refugees from Nazism*

Daniel Snowman

London

Abstract

This article reflects upon some of the issues arising from the author's work on the 'Hitler émigrés'. It looks in particular at the reasons for the huge recent resurgence of scholarly (and popular) interest in the history of the Second World War, Hitler, Nazism and the Holocaust; the relevance – or otherwise – of the Jewishness of many of the 'Hitler émigrés' to what they went on to achieve; and finally culture and identity among asylum-seekers and immigrants, then and now.

I was delighted and honoured when invited to deliver this year's Scouloudi Lecture. Irene Scouloudi was born in this country in 1907. Her parents were both from families of Greek origin; Irene was made to attend Greek Orthodox services, which she didn't find particularly inspiring, and she seems to have grown up with a distaste for religion in general. But something in her personal lineage – perhaps including her obviously non-native name – drew her to the study of immigration and what we would now call ethnicity. At the London School of Economics, she read history as an undergraduate and went on to do a Master's degree for which she wrote a thesis on 'Alien immigration into and alien communities in London 1558–1640'. Irene Scouloudi completed the thesis in 1936 – precisely at a period when London was becoming home to a new wave of immigrants, or 'aliens', some of whom this article will go on to discuss.

What interested Irene Scouloudi was the positive impact on British life that immigrants had been able to make over the years. If, today, everyone

* This article is a revised version of the Scouloudi Lecture delivered in the Beveridge Hall, University of London on 12 June 2003. Some of the ideas in the lecture were also incorporated into the 'Yerushah Lecture', presented in Cambridge on 14 May 2003. I would like to thank Professor Cannadine, the director of the I.H.R., and the Scouloudi Foundation, for inviting me to be the 2003 lecturer. The following people, referred to and/or quoted in the text (and notes), were among the many 'Hitler émigrés' I interviewed between 1997 and 2002: Norbert Brainin (Amadeus Quartet), Milein Cosman Keller, Martin Esslin, Sir Ernst Gombrich, Eric Hobsbawm, Lord Jakobovits, Lord Moser, Siegmund Nissel (Amadeus Quartet), Max Perutz, Peter Pulzer, Karel Reisz and Lord Weidenfeld.

knows of the enormous contribution to British life and culture of the Huguenots who came here from France in the years following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, this is no small measure due to her work as honorary secretary and editor to the Huguenot Society of Great Britain from 1951 to 1987. In 1988 she became the first recipient of an honorary fellowship of the Institute of Historical Research. It is altogether appropriate, therefore, that the biennial Scouloudi Foundation Lecture, of which this is the second, should take place here at the University of London and under the auspices of the I.H.R.

It is even more appropriate, in a way, that we are meeting in Beveridge Hall. Let me begin with a story about the man after whom it's named. In March 1933 – precisely when Irene Scouloudi was at the London School of Economics working on her M.A. about immigrants and aliens – Beveridge, then director of the L.S.E., happened to be visiting Vienna. He recalled later that

Lionel Robbins, one of my colleagues at the School, was also in Vienna at the time . . . meeting fellow economists. He and his wife and Ludwig von Mises and I, sitting in one of the Vienna cafes, were talking of things in general, when an evening paper was brought in, with an announcement that a dozen leading professors of all faculties were being dismissed from posts in German universities by the newly established Nazi regime, either on racial or political grounds. As Mises read out the names to us our wonder grew, and with it grew indignation.¹

That night, Beveridge made an astonishing decision. Robbins recalled the evening in his memoirs and was generous in his assessment:

This was one of Beveridge's great moments . . . his finest hour I would say. All his best instincts, his sympathy with the unfortunate, his sense of civilised values, his administrative vision and inventiveness, were quickened by the question. Slumped in a chair, with his great head characteristically cupped in his fists, thinking aloud, he then and there outlined the basic plan of what became the Academic Assistance Council – later the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning.²

The S.P.S.L. was an organization to which hundreds of émigrés, many of them of great distinction and including a clutch of subsequent Nobel Prize winners, owed the preservation of their careers and in many cases their lives. Robbins was not always so flattering about Beveridge's generous instincts. I would love to have been a fly on the wall the day that Beveridge mentioned to Robbins that he was planning to bring over *en bloc* the entire body of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Robbins, knowing the Frankfurt school's reputation as a stronghold of Marxism, was exasperated and tried to dissuade his director from so rash a step. Robbins

¹ Lord Beveridge, *Power and Influence* (1953), pp. 234–5.

² L. Robbins, *Autobiography of an Economist* (1971), p. 144. Beveridge writes of the origins and early history of the A.A.C. and S.P.S.L. in *Power and Influence*, pp. 234–8, and in his later book *A Defence of Free Learning* (Oxford, 1959).

consulted his conservative comrade-in-arms, Friedrich von Hayek, himself an Austrian émigré, and also the L.S.E.'s aged co-founder Sidney Webb. Eventually Beveridge decided against the move – and had the grace to thank Robbins for his wise counsel.³ But it was a close-run thing, and I have often wondered what the consequences might have been had Beveridge gone ahead. Who knows? If some of the famous Frankfurt refugees such as Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer had found a permanent base here in London rather than in the United States, maybe the great spearhead of New Left radicalism in the nineteen-sixties would have been not in Berkeley or Berlin but right here in the University of London.

The theme of this article is the 'Hitler émigrés' who came to this country. 'Emigrés' note; not 'refugees'. The word 'refugee' (*réfugié*) was first used, I believe, about the French Huguenots who fled to this country after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. But not all the 'Hitler émigrés' were refugees, at first at any rate. Hayek did not come to Britain as a refugee. Nor, for example, did the architect Berthold Lubetkin, the film producer Alexander Korda or the art historian Ernst Gombrich. These, in each case, initially came to Britain to work; then, as the situation in central Europe deteriorated, it became increasingly obvious that this was the place to stay. The Vienna-born biochemist Max Perutz came to Britain as a student, while the historian Eric Hobsbawm arrived from Hitler's Germany as an adolescent, not as a refugee but with a British passport and under the care of an uncle who had work here. Some – the philosopher Karl Popper comes to mind, or the conductor Georg Solti – were refugees elsewhere during the war before later settling in Britain. And, of course, a tiny handful of people arrived in this country after the war, having miraculously survived the Nazis' camps: people like the musicians Rudolf Schwarz and Anita Lasker Wallfisch, or Rabbi Hugo Gryn.

On the subject of terminology, you will notice that I also have not used the word 'exile'. Maybe I should. There is a thriving industry in 'exile studies'; the University of London has a 'Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies', and I have been happy to make use of some the excellent work they have produced. But Hobsbawm, Korda, Perutz, Gombrich – these were not exiles. Nor even were those who were authentic refugees: the filmmaker Karel Reisz, the publisher George Weidenfeld, the musician and broadcaster Hans Keller or the three members of the Amadeus Quartet who came to Britain as teenagers from post-*Anschluss* Austria. An exile, one of the people I interviewed put it to me, is someone who hangs up his harp on the willow tree and yearns for his homeland, his *Heimat*. 'I spent the first fifteen years of my life in Germany', said another, 'but I've spent the next sixty-five in Britain. This is my homeland'. Many who settled here but retained the vestige of an accent, found it irritating when, after many years, people still asked them

³ Robbins, p. 140.

‘Where are you from?’, when the answer, of course, was Hampstead, Swiss Cottage or St. John’s Wood.⁴ A few of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ did go back to live in central Europe, particularly communists who were attracted (as was Brecht) to East Germany. Some, such as the physicist Max Born, felt it their duty to help build up the new post-Hitlerian Germany (like the lawyer in the recent film *Nowhere in Africa*). But many thought that this could be achieved just as well from Britain. Think of Weidenfeld, who made a point of publishing English-language editions of books by bright young Germans and Austrians, or the Amadeus Quartet who for many years had a recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon.

So, for want of a better term, we are talking about the ‘Hitler émigrés’ and, in particular, about their impact on British cultural life. And by ‘cultural’ life I suppose I mean primarily what they would have meant by the word ‘culture’ – that is, the intellectual life and the high arts (the old-fashioned, rather than the more current, anthropological use of the word ‘culture’). The focus of this article, therefore, is on what the ‘Hitler émigrés’ brought to British art, architecture, film, photography, music, literature, the press, broadcasting and the academic humanities, sciences and social sciences, and on how their contribution fitted in with the wider background of British cultural history as a whole – the war, the development of the welfare state (more Beveridge), the Arts Council, the B.B.C. Third Programme, the Festival of Britain and so on. What resulted when people schooled in the high culture of pre-Hitlerian *Mitteleuropa* (Expressionist art, Bauhaus architecture, Schoenbergian Modernism) began to mix their labours with the rather different culture they encountered in Britain (initially, of course, the – to them – alien world of Bloomsbury, Garden Cities, John Reith’s B.B.C., the pastoralism of Holst and Vaughan Williams)? What happened when people raised in culture ‘A’ encountered people raised in culture ‘B’? It was the admixture of the two that helped to create the richly mixed cultural milieu from which so many of us have benefited.

The primary focus of *The Hitler Emigrés* was on the past sixty-odd years of British cultural history.⁵ But, at least by implication, it was about a lot of other things as well. In some respects, it was a study of ‘Cultural transfer’: what happens when people raised in one intellectual environment encounter, and live among, people imbued with another? How far do they assimilate, integrate, acculturate or remain in a cultural ghetto? It was also in part a generational study: older migrants, such as the Berlin theatre critic Alfred Kerr, found it harder to adjust to a new country and an unfamiliar language than did his children Michael and Judith (one of whom later became a distinguished judge and the other one of our

⁴ See, e.g., the charming memoir by Carl F. Flesch (son of the celebrated violinist), ‘Where do you come from?’ *Hitler Refugees in Great Britain Then and Now: the Happy Compromise!* (2001).

⁵ D. Snowman, *The Hitler Emigrés: the Cultural Impact on Britain of Refugees from Nazism* (2002).

leading writers for children and adolescents).⁶ This generational aspect of the émigré experience was also one of the themes of *Nowhere in Africa*.

Did German and Austrian refugees leave a different mark on their new homeland? Perry Anderson once argued that the German émigrés tended to be the more radical and gravitated towards the United States (he had in mind people like Brecht, or some of the Frankfurt philosophers), whereas those raised in old Austria-Hungary such as Popper, Gombrich and Hayek found conservative, class-bound Britain more of a magnet.⁷ I find this too schematic. I can think of many conservative figures who made their homes in the United States (Hayek himself in later life) and plenty of radicals who settled in the U.K. (think of Isaac Deutscher, Eric Hobsbawm or the cartoonist Vicky, for example). Apart from which, most émigrés simply ended up wherever they had a friend, a cousin, a contact, the chance of a job; few had the luxury of choosing where they would go. I would argue that there was, nevertheless, a difference between the impact of the emigration from Nazism on British and American cultural life and that, overall, it was probably greater here in Britain. It is not only that the numbers who came to the U.K. were proportionately larger. In addition, Britain was a comparatively homogeneous society in the nineteen-thirties in which a sudden wave of migrants had a greater cumulative impact than in the U.S.A. which, after all, had historically been built up by waves and waves of immigrants. In America, too, the émigrés were soon dispersed all over the country – to New York and New Haven, Boston and Black Mountain College, Los Alamos and Los Angeles.⁸ In

⁶ Marion Berghahn examines the question of the 'assimilation', 'acculturation' etc. of the Hitler émigrés, as well as the generational issue, in *German-Jewish Refugees in England: the Ambiguities of Assimilation* (1984). Alfred Kerr is transparently disguised as the wise father in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1st edn., 1971; 1998) by his daughter Judith Kerr, and is evocatively described in George Weidenfeld's autobiography, *Remembering My Good Friends* (1995), p. 106. For a longer, English-language consideration of the life and work of Alfred Kerr after his arrival in Britain, see D. Vietor-Englander in *Between Two Languages: German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain, 1933–45*, ed. W. Abbey and others (Stuttgart, 1995).

⁷ P. Anderson, 'Components of the national culture', *New Left Review*, no. 50 (July–Aug. 1968), pp. 3–57.

⁸ There is a large bibliography on the intellectual and cultural impact of the 'Hitler Emigrés' who went to the U.S.A. In addition to countless individual biographies and memoirs (and Christopher Hampton's play *Tales from Hollywood* (1983)), these include: *Hitler's Exiles: Personal Stories of the Flight from Nazi Germany to America*, ed. M. M. Anderson (New York, 1998); *Exiles + Emigrés: the Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, ed. S. Barron (Los Angeles, Calif., 1997); L. Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: the Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930–41* (Chicago, Ill., 1968); *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–60*, ed. D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (Cambridge, Mass., 1969); A. Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present* (New York, 1983); H. S. Hughes, *The Sea Change: the Migration of Social Thought, 1930–65* (1975); *The Muses Flee Hitler: Cultural Transfer and Adaptation, 1930–45*, ed. J. C. Jackman and C. M. Borden (Washington, D.C., 1983); C.-D. Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile: Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research* (Amherst, Mass., 1993); A. J. Peck, *The German-Jewish Legacy in America 1938–88* (Detroit, Mich., 1989); *The Cultural Exodus from Austria*, ed. F. Stadler and P. Weibel (Vienna, 1995); J. R. Taylor, *Strangers in Paradise: the Hollywood Emigrés, 1933–50* (1983).

the U.K., by contrast, they were more concentrated, forming something like what the physicists among them would have called a ‘critical mass’.

It is for this reason that my research has concentrated largely on London (with occasional forays to elite places like Oxford and Cambridge, Edinburgh and Glyndebourne). It has been pointed out that I have discussed very few women and, to compound the political incorrectness, that I have homed in on indisputably tall poppies, an intellectual and cultural elite, purveyors of high excellence. To such charges I would humbly submit (as Hans Keller used to say) that, first, in pre-Hitlerian central Europe, high culture was a predominantly masculine pursuit; and, second, that, like it or not, the tall (primarily male) poppies upon whom I focus did mostly settle in places like north-west London and not equally around the country.

Each of these topics warrants an article in itself – food, no doubt, for lively historiographical disputation. But here I will consider three further readings that seem to me to have considerable contemporary resonance. Many have read *The Hitler Emigrés* as a contribution to Nazi and Holocaust studies. Others have seen it as being about what people a generation ago would have called the ‘Jewish contribution to civilization’. And, finally, the book has been widely reviewed as a case study illustrating the benefits of a generous immigration policy.

Over the past decade or so, we have experienced an extraordinary resurgence of interest in Hitler, Nazism and the Second World War. A succession of films, books and television programmes on the subject have sprung up, like the endless progeny of Banquo, while hardly a week has gone by without prominent press coverage of yet another Nazi-related story: ‘Nazi gold’ in Swiss banks; Jörg Haider and the Freedom Party in Austria; the uncovering and arrest of yet another elderly alleged war criminal; what to do with art works looted by the Nazis; how far Pope Pius XII (or Britain’s duke of Windsor) gave unwarranted support to Nazi plans; the David Irving trial and the issue of ‘Holocaust denial’; whether to mark Hitler’s birthplace; the inauguration in various countries (including Britain) of Holocaust memorials, museums and days; and the performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony on the site of the Mauthausen concentration camp.

There are, of course, good reasons why the Nazi era retains so powerful a purchase upon the collective imagination. The unprecedented barbarity unleashed by the Hitler regime continues to hold a ghoulish fascination, while the epic struggle by which it was overcome provides inexhaustible material for inspiration and research. This greatest war in history was widely perceived as one in which forces of monumental evil had to be utterly eliminated if civilization were to survive. This, surely, was what medieval theologians and Renaissance jurists meant by a ‘just war’. Such a war inevitably cast a giant shadow over all subsequent history, and continues to do so in our own times. But there are further

reasons why the Nazi era returned to particular prominence at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

The very method by which the Second World War had been ended, the dropping of atomic bombs, gave notice of a new threat to civilization, potentially every bit as conclusive as the one just defeated, and for forty-odd years the world lived under another shadow, the threat of nuclear annihilation. The eventual end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. caused people to rub their eyes with disbelief as they gradually realized that thermonuclear holocaust had been avoided, at least for the time being, and saw the Soviet Union revealed as a sham, a charade, a chimera that dissolved, like a magician's stage set, in a puff of smoke.

The elimination of the U.S.S.R. was widely seen in the West as a great triumph, the final removal of the 'evil empire'. One incidental result was the opening up of Soviet archives. This, as Ian Kershaw⁹ and others have pointed out, helped to shift the centre of gravity for historical research from Germany itself to Russia and eastern Europe – the very epicentre of the Holocaust. One very practical reason, perhaps, for the growth of interest in the Holocaust over the past decade or so. More generally, the end of the Cold War removed many of the geopolitical certainties of the previous half century, a bipolar world of good guys and bad. In the post-Cold War era, such certainties were no longer available as the world settled into a period of moral relativism, or what might be termed geopolitical post-modernism. In such a climate it is not, perhaps, surprising if there was a renewed hankering for the black-and-white certainties of yesteryear.

It seems that people need a 'hate figure' as part of a healthy psychological tool kit. Think how, over the years, we lapped up almost incredible stories about a succession of unmitigatedly 'evil' characters – Idi Amin, Colonel Gaddafi, Radovan Karadzic, Slobodan Milosovic, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein – each of whom was demonized, routinely compared with Hitler, and then dropped for a while as other stories took over. And it is said that the British were well-adjusted to reality and unusually lacking in neurosis while fighting the Second World War – a war in which, more than any other, pretty much every British participant believed in the cause for which he or she was fighting.¹⁰ It is hardly surprising, then, if, robbed of the psychologically convenient ogre of the Soviet Union, popular attention in the West in the nineteen-nineties reverted once more to the Nazi period.

In Germany, where historians had long struggled to comprehend the nature of Nazism, reunification brought about renewed public debate. In East Germany it had been common to portray Nazism as a barbarous

⁹ I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (4th edn., 2000), p. 269.

¹⁰ Angus Calder records that statistics for suicide and drunkenness fell during the war (A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–45* (1969), p. 223).

form of capitalism that only communists had consistently opposed, while many in West Germany had found comfort in regarding the twelve years of Nazism (and the entire Hitler gang) as uniquely abhorrent and aberrant and therefore, in a sense, outside history. Clearly, such politically self-serving and often simplistic explanations would no longer suffice – just as Austrians can no longer take comfort from the illusion that their innocent nation was ‘annexed’ by the Third Reich.¹¹ In America, too, there were particular reasons why the war grew to great prominence several decades after the event (you can read some of them in Peter Novick’s thought-provoking book *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, in which he considers how and why the Holocaust gradually emerged to become absolutely central to the self-definition of American Jewry).¹²

And in Britain? The recurrent interest in the Nazi era is also in part a reflection on subsequent history. The war was the last time that the U.K. played a unique and pivotal role in world affairs (a fact pinpointed a few years later by the former U.S. secretary of state, Dean Acheson, when he said that Great Britain had ‘lost an empire and not yet found a role’). As Britain slipped ever further from those heroic days when she had ‘stood alone’, many fell back on myths and memories of wartime heroism for solace and inspiration. Politicians were not immune from the temptation, as successive leaders evoked the spirit of Churchill (and Hitler) when ordering troops to foil the evil machinations of ruthless foreign dictators in the Falklands, the Gulf (twice) or Kosovo.

But I think there is a further reason why the Nazi era has returned once more to prominence. By the turn of the millennium, the war was receding from living memory. Many with personal experience of it had died and, for their grandchildren’s generation, it was gradually becoming consigned, almost like Agincourt or the Armada, to the fusty realm of myth. But the events and impact of the Second World War had been so momentous that many of the older generation became determined that first-hand knowledge of this of all wars should be preserved. Personal memoirs were recorded and videoed, archive banks accumulated, educational courses installed and museums opened. The more curious of the younger generation – like the boy Raleigh in the Millais painting – became keen to learn what things had been like when giants and demons stalked the earth. Just as our Victorian ancestors would ask their pliant grandparents about Waterloo, so, today, as the last participants in the Second World War approach the end of their lives, there is an almost palpable desire – among people of all ages – to spin out for as long as possible the direct legacy of that epochal era, soon to be lost to memory, as if anxious to retain the chain until the last link is finally broken.

¹¹ Kershaw, *passim*, and see, in particular, chs. 1 (‘Historians and the problem of explaining Nazism’) and 10 (‘Shifting perspectives: historiographical trends in the aftermath of unification’).

¹² P. Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: the American Experience* (2001).

So, as the twentieth century crept towards its end, politicians and media indulged in an orgy of retrospection, marking with due solemnity, and a plethora of reminiscences from the elderly, the anniversaries of the Munich Agreement, the outbreak of war, the arrival of Churchill in Downing Street, the Battle of Britain, the D-Day landings, the discovery of the concentration camps, V.E. and V.J. Days. By the turn of the century, nobody in Britain could doubt that this, their country's 'finest hour', had also been the furnace in which the lives of all who lived thereafter had been tempered. So I suppose it was inevitable that any book with a title like *The Hitler Emigrés* – even if primarily about British cultural life – would be seen as a contribution to the vast literature about Germans, Nazism and the Second World War.

It has also been read as being about Jews, Jewry and the Jewish 'contribution'. Here again, I do not so much want to demur as to reflect. The question here is: what was the relevance – if any – of the Jewishness of so many of the 'Hitler émigrés' to what they went on to achieve? I suppose the first thing to say is that many of the 'Hitler émigrés' were not Jewish. So far as I know, the artistic founding fathers of Glyndebourne, the director Carl Ebert and the conductor Fritz Busch, were not Jewish. Ebert had been *Intendant* of the Charlottenburg Opera in Berlin (predecessor of today's *Deutsche Oper*) and Busch artistic director of Dresden's Semperoper. These were powerful, independent-minded figures who could not abide a regime that burned books and told them which works they could and could not perform, which musicians or set designers they could and could not employ. Hayek, who had come to the L.S.E. in 1931 and was to stay for twenty years, was not Jewish but from a quasi-noble Viennese family which had produced strings of scientists and civil servants. Kokoschka wasn't Jewish, nor Fritz Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*. Nor were Walter Gropius or Rudolf Laban, both of whom tried to make some accommodation with the Nazi regime in its early years but found this increasingly impossible.

Many of the 'Hitler émigrés' were of course Jewish, but often only nominally so. 'To my parents, especially my father', recalled Claus Moser, 'being German came first. He thought of himself as a German, and only then as a Jew'. Lord Moser's father was a wealthy and distinguished banker in pre-Hitlerian Berlin. He had fought in the First World War and he and his wife, like so many others in their position, thought of themselves as proud and patriotic Germans. 'That's why so many of them thought – tragically wrongly – that things would be all right', their son told me, 'that this Hitler thing would pass over and they would be OK. They thought it wouldn't touch people like them because they were such good Germans!'

Lord Moser's memory was shared by many other refugees from Nazism who came from Jewish backgrounds. 'This terrible thing cannot last. Germany is a civilized nation and these barbarians will soon be out.' This

was the father of the artist Milein Cosman (wife of the musician and broadcaster Hans Keller). Peter Fröhlich, who went on to become the American historian Peter Gay, had two uncles called Siegfried. 'We were the real Germans', he recalled thinking when he was young. 'The gangsters who had taken control of the country were not Germany – we were'. The real Germany, after all, was 'the most civilized of countries'.¹³

And here is Fred Uhlman, in his semi-autobiographical novella, *Reunion*, about a young Jewish boy brought up in Stuttgart in the nineteen-thirties: 'All I knew then was that this was my country, my home, without a beginning and without an end, and that to be Jewish was fundamentally no more significant than to be born with dark hair and not with red'.¹⁴ The boy's father is a proud patriot and his Iron Cross, first class, hangs over the bed alongside a picture of the Goethe-Haus in Weimar. 'I know my Germany', says the father, a popular doctor, respected (he is sure) by his Jewish and Gentile patients alike. 'This is a temporary illness, something like measles, which will pass as soon as the economic situation improves. Do you really believe the compatriots of Goethe and Schiller, Kant and Beethoven will fall for this rubbish?'¹⁵

The cultural references are significant. Again and again, it is music, art, literature, that people, later émigrés from Hitler, mentioned when reflecting upon what had made them and their families so proudly German. This is the case not just for German nationals but for people from all over German-speaking central Europe. Nor was the culture that they admired and imbibed exclusively German but included a knowledge of languages (ancient and modern), of the fine arts – and a willingness to cross artistic boundaries. Thus, Schoenberg was a fine painter, Kandinsky interested in theories of music. The art historian Ernst Gombrich and the philosopher Karl Popper both adored music (and had mothers who were excellent pianists). Popper indeed – like Claus Moser – dreamed as a boy of becoming a professional musician. Martin Esslin, for many years the B.B.C.'s distinguished head of drama and world expert on Brecht and the Theatre of the Absurd, learned Greek and Latin at the age of twelve and by the time he was an adolescent had added reasonable French, English, Italian and Spanish. In Britain, Lord Moser told me, voicing a sentiment shared by countless others, 'culture was the icing on the cake, whereas in Central Europe we were raised to think it *was* the cake!'

This is not to suggest that German Jewry *en bloc* was oblivious to its Jewish legacy. Far from it. There was a thriving religious life throughout the German-speaking world; one only has to recall the number of synagogues and other avowedly Jewish premises destroyed during *Kristallnacht*. Or the

¹³ P. Gay, *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin* (1998), pp. 111–12.

¹⁴ F. Uhlman, *Reunion* (1997), p. 39.

¹⁵ Uhlman, *Reunion*, p. 40.

huge contribution later made to Orthodox Anglo-Jewry by people like Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi during the Thatcher years, or, in the Reform and Liberal communities, by Leo Baeck, Ignaz Maybaum, Hugo Gryn, John Rayner and Albert Friedlander. And, of course, many central European Jews became ardent Zionists. Zionism, said, George Weidenfeld, became his guiding beacon.¹⁶ The interesting question is not why people like Immanuel Jakobovits or Hugo Gryn retained their Jewish faith or Weidenfeld his Zionism but why so many of the Jews of German-speaking central Europe, even though more or less oblivious of their Jewishness, seemed to excel in the professional, intellectual and cultural worlds. Was there anything specifically 'Jewish' about their achievements?

There are what you might call both positive and negative answers to that question. Throughout Jewish history, from Biblical times really, great emphasis had been placed on learning. The mythologized figures in the Jewish past had been men of God, rabbis, scholars. Daniel and his friends are praised for their devotion to their studies, Solomon for his wisdom. From the Biblical Moses to Moses Maimonides in the twelfth century to Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth, it is the prophets and philosophers, the scribes and the scholars quite as much as the kings and generals who are the role models. In the Russian and Polish Pale, in the *shtetl* and synagogue, the pivotal figure is the rabbi and he is not so much a preacher or prayer leader as a teacher and scholar, the person responsible for the education of the next generation, the only figure in town capable of solving difficult questions of Jewish law. Even Jews who were not particularly conscious of their Jewish ancestry, or believed they had transcended or disavowed it (like Heine, Marx, Mahler, Schnitzler or Freud), tended to gravitate towards achievement in the intellectual and cultural worlds. Devotion to learning is a constant theme throughout Jewish history, one that was much in evidence in pre-Hitlerian middle Europe. In *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Jews made up about ten per cent of the population (200,000 in a population of around two million), but they accounted for something like thirty per cent of the pupils enrolled in those elite grammar schools known as *Gymnasien*.¹⁷

It would be foolish to read too much into this admiration for learning or to apply it indiscriminately to all Jewish communities in the past. At certain times and places, it was the Jewish merchant or moneylender, for example, who became the archetype rather than the scholar or thinker. However, at least until the establishment of the state of Israel, Jews were not especially distinguished for their agricultural or military skills. But as writers and musicians, thinkers and mathematicians, people of Jewish origin

¹⁶ For the impact on Anglo-Jewish religious life, see *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, ed. W. Mosse and others (Tübingen, 1991), pp. 405–62. George Weidenfeld's Zionism is a recurrent theme in his *Remembering My Good Friends*.

¹⁷ S. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: a Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 52.

and background had long been disproportionately prominent. To some extent, as I have suggested, this probably derives from the age-old emphasis on the value of learning, perhaps going back to rabbinic and even Biblical times.

But I suspect it also arises from other, what you might call ‘negative’ causes as well. If you were a young Jewish man in late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century Vienna or Berlin, you would have known without it being spelled out to you that the upper ranks of certain professions were, in effect, barred. You would have been unlikely to aspire towards a career in the army, diplomacy, politics or (obviously) the Church, for example. These professions tended to lend themselves to the sons of the social elite, and a young Jew, however gifted and ambitious, would probably have been courting rejection if he had set serious sights on them. ‘A diplomat!’, Fred Uhlman’s father expostulates cruelly when his innocent son suggests the profession he thinks he might enter. ‘Why not a Pope? Has anybody ever heard of a Jew in the diplomatic service? Do you think I am Bismarck?’¹⁸

It was partly a question of anti-Semitism; one only has to read the prose works of Wagner or the political speeches of Karl Lueger, the mayor of Vienna at the turn of the century, or to recall the fate of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew who entered the army service in France, to be reminded that anti-Semitism was not invented by Adolf Hitler. Far better to gravitate towards those fields in which Jews (with all that *Gymnasium* education behind them) tended to be more widely accepted – the law and medicine, economics and philosophy, music, literature, journalism and publishing. Steven Beller suggests that over half of those teaching in the faculty of medicine at the University of Vienna in 1910, and over a third of those teaching law, were of Jewish descent.¹⁹ So the reasons why so many Jews moved into such fields probably included both the traditional ‘pull’ towards learning as well as the ‘push’ of exclusion from the upper reaches of the army or politics. ‘Culture’, in other words, provided a gateway to social mobility.²⁰

There is a further point. Many of the leading figures in these liberal, cultural professions may have been Jewish, but, as we have seen, would have considered themselves no more than nominally so. Some had even been converted to Christianity, although conversion fooled no one. Jewish converts were often uncomfortable with their adopted faith and unlikely to tempt providence by trying to ‘pass’ in a traditionally closed profession. In any case, one of the main reasons for conversion was usually to help the proselytizing family to keep out of the spotlight. Many more were

¹⁸ F. Uhlman, *The Making of an Englishman* (1960), p. 60.

¹⁹ Beller, p. 36.

²⁰ The (Vienna-born) Peter Pulzer discussed the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ that led German and Austrian Jews towards the liberal and intellectual professions in his Fritz Thyssen Lecture, ‘What shall I put in my luggage? Thoughts on the cultural migration from central Europe’, delivered in Jerusalem in June 1999.

neither converts nor practising Jews but, rather, thought of themselves as thoroughly 'assimilated'. And assimilation presupposed, almost by definition, the rejection of partisan ideology, separatism, exclusivity, dogma – Jewish, or any other – and, in their place, the aspiration to cross boundaries, embrace universal truths and the whole of humanity. These were the sentiments of the press and the academy, not of the army, Church or politics. 'All Men will be Brothers', Schiller had written, a cry famously hymned by Beethoven and echoed for a century thereafter by liberal intellectuals – including many assimilated Jews – who were neatly able to marry their cultural Germanism with a belief in universal values.

Many of these liberal-minded German Jews of central Europe had roots further east, in the villages of Poland and Russia, Moravia, Hungary and Romania; but, if so, most were proud of having shaken the mud from their ancestral boots, thrown off their kaftans and *yarmulkes*, and moved upwards (and westwards) to a comfortable life of urbane sophistication in Breslau and Berlin, Munich and Vienna. To such people, eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*) represented the past, those who had not made it, people without culture who clung on to outmoded attitudes and rituals. Silvia Rodgers, brought up in Berlin by Polish parents, was taken on a visit to Poland in 1934 and later recalled seeing a country and a Jewish community that 'to me, brought up in Germany, did look bizarre, as if from a previous century or another world'.²¹ Germany, by contrast, stood for urban and urbane life rather than the fields and the ghetto, emancipation and enlightenment rather than atavistic obscurantism. Perhaps it was not so surprising after all, nor particularly reprehensible, that so many cultured families in Hitler's *Mitteleuropa* were 'more German than the Germans'.

Was there *nothing* specifically Jewish, then, about the later work in Britain of Gombrich, Popper or the Amadeus Quartet? Gombrich, to the end of his long life, denied that his Jewishness had anything to do with his art history. Who cares, he asked, whether this or that historian or philosopher happened to be Jewish? – adding pointedly that he would rather leave such questions to the Gestapo. From the opposite corner, as it were, Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi during the nineteen-eighties, told me with equal vehemence that he too could see nothing in the ideas of Marx or Freud (or Mahler or Einstein for that matter) that arose in any way from their Jewish backgrounds. As an orthodox rabbi, Lord Jakobovits regarded the historical importance of such people as lying outside Jewish history and therefore neither influenced by nor contributing to it.

I wonder. Franz Rudolf Bienenfeld was a distinguished Austrian-Jewish lawyer who fled Hitler's Vienna for London and went on to become a

²¹ S. Rodgers, *Red Saint, Pink Daughter: a Communist Childhood in Berlin and London* (Manchester, 1997), p. 108.

leading figure in the Board of Deputies and the World Jewish Congress. Bienenfeld gave a lecture to the Sociological Society of Vienna in November 1937 (published in English in 1944), in which he argued that there was a clear link between traditional, religious Judaism and the vision of people like Marx, Freud, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and the rest – the famous litany of non-religious Jews. He identified what he considered four central tenets of Judaism going back to Biblical and Talmudic times: a preoccupation with Justice and the idea of ‘The Law’; the idea of Equality before God (nobody intervenes between you and Him); the importance of Knowledge, or Reason – that every issue should be open to rational discussion and debate; and the primacy of This World (heaven is not mentioned very often, and hell almost never). Justice, Equality, Reason and the reality of This World. These, argues Bienenfeld, are the kind of principles that underpinned the eighteenth-century Enlightenment (they are just the sort of qualities attributed by Gotthold Lessing to the eponymous hero of his 1779 play *Nathan the Wise*, for example – one of the dramas featured in the 2003 Chichester Festival). Jews, in other words, were ahead of the game. It was not that people like Moses Mendelssohn were allowed out of the ghetto to join the mainstream of history. On the contrary, Europe caught up with the Jews. ‘For the first time in two thousand years’, says Bienenfeld, Jews ‘saw the possibility of partaking in the fashioning of a new sort of society without relinquishing their fundamental beliefs’.²²

Even, that is, non-religious Jews. This is where I begin to part company with Bienenfeld. Marx and Trotsky were doubtless motivated by a vision of what they thought would bring greater social justice and equality. And it is true that people of Jewish background have often figured prominently in attempts at making this world a better place. I remember noticing this when I became involved in the American civil rights movement in the early nineteen-sixties, for example, when quite obviously a disproportionately high number of those involved in the various voter registration campaigns in the South were Jews from the big northern cities. American Jews at that time were the only easily identifiable middle- or even upper-middle-class socioeconomic group that consistently identified with ‘left-wing’ or Democratic political causes: money for improved housing, education, health-care or welfare programmes and the like.

Was this a vestige of the traditional Biblical concern with social support, *Tzedakah*, taking in the stranger, that one also saw in (for example) the communism, or communalism, of the early Kibbutz movement or in the ideas of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg? Possibly. But to argue this back to the ancient pillars of religious Judaism, to the injunctions of the Bible and the early rabbis, seems to me questionable. You cannot have it both ways. Bienenfeld acknowledges that many of the people he writes about,

²² F. R. Bienenfeld, *The Religion of the Non-religious Jews: a Lecture Delivered to the Sociological Society of Vienna . . . 1937* (1944).

far from being Jewish in any religious meaning of the word, had thrown off traditional Judaism, felt they had transcended it – indeed, didn't know much about it. But at the same time (and I think he had been reading too much Freud!), he argues that, subconsciously, these same people – Trotsky and company – had retained much of what they were unaware of consciously, or had disavowed. Certain 'main principles of the Jewish religion', he asserts, continued to operate 'within the minds and souls of the non-religious Jews' and determined their attitude towards life – principles which were 'alive and potent in spite of the estrangement of their bearers from the ritual, usually without their conscious knowledge and notwithstanding their contempt for Jewish traditions'.

Mention of Trotsky brings to mind another writer who tried to grasp this thorny issue: Isaac Deutscher. In an essay entitled 'The Non-Jewish Jew', Deutscher considers what he calls the great Jewish 'heretics' – he adds figures such as Spinoza and Heine to the familiar litany of Marx, Freud and the rest – and, like Bienenfeld, wonders what they had in common.²³ To Deutscher, it is not a question of vestigial, or subconscious religiosity. He argues that these, and people like them, gained their special strength from the fact that they dwelt on the borders of various civilizations, religions and national cultures and were born and brought up on the borderlines of epochs. 'Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilised each other', says Deutscher. 'They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it'. Steven Beller, writing about Jews in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, shows how they inhabited 'the centre of culture but the edge of society'.²⁴

In other words, the very fact that Marx, Mahler, Freud and the rest transcended their Jewishness and reached out to cross boundaries of mind, place and even time, itself arose – paradoxically – from deep within Jewish history and tradition. It has sometimes been suggested that (from the wanderings in the Sinai desert, indeed) Jewish achievement is, at core, that of a scattered diaspora, of a world-wide, cosmopolitan people linked by the shared legacy of settlement, upheaval, flight and resettlement (by this account, Israel becomes something of an historical by-way rather than the aspiration towards which Jewish history had always been leading). 'If there was anything specifically Jewish about it', Eric Hobsbawm wrote in his autobiography, reflecting on the scattered family of his childhood, 'it was the assumption among all of them that the family was a network stretching across countries and oceans, that shifting between countries was a normal part of life'. The Jews, he agreed with a French colleague, were 'un peuple en diaspora'.²⁵

²³ I. Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1968).

²⁴ Beller, pp. 216–17.

²⁵ E. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: a 20th-Century Life* (2002), pp. 15, 25.

There has been something of a ‘Diaspora boom’ recently; my bookshelves include a clutch of new titles like *Scattered Among the Peoples, Diasporas and Exiles*, *Jewries at the Frontier*. Sander Gilman has written an essay, ‘The frontier as a model for Jewish history’, in which he attempts to reconcile the competing claims on Jewish identity of Israel and the Diaspora – centre and periphery – and suggests that, post the creation of Israel, it is the idea of ‘living on the frontier’ that provides the key to understanding the modern Jewish experience. The ‘frontier’ in Gilman’s formulation is no longer the outpost – the ‘periphery’ – that it was, say, to Frederick Jackson Turner, or regarded as a place of temporary exile. On the contrary, almost everyone nowadays lives on frontiers, on margins, on intellectual borderlands, in worlds that cross cultures – so that the Jewish experience of ‘Diaspora’ (archetypally perhaps in pre-Hitlerian central Europe) has therefore led the way to the modern world we know today. This ‘diasporic’ view of Jewish history is, if you like, a kind of positive gloss on the old image of the Wandering Jew.²⁶

As I studied the life and work of the ‘Hitler émigrés’, I repeatedly encountered a sense that, certainly in the modern, twentieth-century world, homelessness was almost regarded as a virtue, that the only true culture was one that crossed boundaries. ‘The bags are always packed’ – at least intellectually. Anthony Julius, in a stimulating exploration of what is Jewish about Jewish art, refers at one point to the painter Mark Rothko, who was born Rothkovich in Russia but lived as an émigré in the United States. Rothko, suggests Julius, reveals himself as a painter of Jewish origins in his ‘insistence upon the universal character of art’, and his quest for a form of representation ‘which unifies all human experience’. Jewish universalism again.²⁷

And indeed, many of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ gravitated towards international, multicultural or cross-disciplinary areas of interest. There were journalists (such as Hella Pick) who gave British readers a broad international perspective on the stories of the day, publishers (like Weidenfeld or Deutsch) who consciously acted as bridges between languages and cultures, historians (Eric Hobsbawm is the classic example) who helped us to study historical processes across national boundaries. Gombrich brought to art history

²⁶ A. Levine, *Scattered Among the Peoples: the Jewish Diaspora in Ten Portraits* (Toronto, 2002); *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, ed. H. Wettstein (Berkeley, Calif., 2002); *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. S. L. Gilman and M. Shain (Urbana, Ill., 1999). Gilman’s essay ‘The frontier as a model for Jewish history’, originally the introduction to *Jewries at the Frontier*, is reprinted with modifications in S. L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories and Identities* (2003).

²⁷ Anthony Julius writes of Rothko in *Idolizing Pictures: Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Jewish Art* (2000), p. 98. Silvia Rodgers – a red-haired Jewess born to communist Polish parents – writes sensitively of the ‘betwixts and between’s’ of her Berlin childhood. This multiple ‘marginality’, she says, was dangerous in Nazi Germany – but after migration, it became a strength (in England, ‘I have come to glory in it as a gift’ (Rodgers, p. 12)). But she adds a sting in the tail, pointing out that, in German, the word ‘*Gift*’ also means poison!

insights from psychology and anthropology. The excellent recent biography of Arthur Koestler by David Cesarani is entitled *The Homeless Mind*. Is the diasporic experience the norm? Isaac Deutscher is not, I suspect, alone in believing that this very process of travel – and travail – across constricting boundaries is precisely what had defined Jews from time immemorial.

It is also, of course, what defines the émigré, the exile, the refugee – the ‘asylum seeker’ in today’s jargon – my final topic. I would like to start with a couple of quotations, both of which may sound familiar. The first is from the British home secretary, who said in the house of commons:

While . . . it is proposed to pursue the policy of offering asylum as far as is practicable . . . it is essential to avoid creating an impression that the door is open to immigrants of all kinds. If such an impression were created would-be immigrants would present themselves at the ports in such large numbers that it would be impossible to admit them all, great difficulties would be experienced deciding who could be properly admitted, and unnecessary hardship would be inflicted on those who had made a fruitless journey across the Continent.

The second quotation is from the *Daily Mail*:

To be ruled by misguided sentimentalism . . . would be disastrous . . . once it was known that Britain offered sanctuary to all who cared to come, the floodgates would be opened, and we should be inundated by thousands seeking a home.

Both quotations date from March 1938, a week or so after the *Anschluss* when Hitler entered Vienna in triumph, adding Austria to the Third Reich.²⁸ It is often thought that the ‘Hitler émigrés’ who applied to come to Britain were highly favoured asylum seekers, afforded special status and welcomed with open arms. Not so. Not, at least, by everybody; or at first.

The total number of émigrés from Hitler’s central Europe who came to Britain, and settled here (as opposed to those who went on to the United States and elsewhere), was probably not a lot over 50,000. Not many, when you consider that in recent years the U.K. has often been getting over 70,000 asylum applications a year. And make no mistake, many of those we are talking about were asylum seekers; think of those 10,000 youngsters who came over with the so-called Children’s Transports in the final year or so before war broke out – people like Siegmund Nissel and Peter Schidlof, later of the Amadeus Quartet, or the filmmaker Karel Reisz. Should – could – Britain have been more generous? This is a complex issue which is not the subject of this article. But before we rush to judgement, we should perhaps remember that

²⁸ The home secretary, Leslie Hore-Belisha, was speaking in the house of commons on 22 March 1938, while the quotation from the *Daily Mail* is from the issue of 23 March 1938. Both are reproduced in A. J. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933–9* (Elek, 1973), pp. 93–4.

Britain, like America, was going through severe economic recession in the nineteen-thirties, and, of course, nobody at the time could have imagined the horrors, the death camps, that came later.²⁹

Today refugees are again knocking at the door asking for asylum in Britain, this time from Asia, north Africa, eastern Europe and the Balkans. All over the world, indeed, people are trying to migrate in ever greater numbers from the poorer or more unstable regions of the world to the wealthier, while governments such as the British struggle to find policies that they think will be wise, just – and politically acceptable, a difficult juggling act, not helped by a popular press happy to fuel rampant xenophobia. ‘So what is new?’, you may think. Immigrants everywhere have always appeared to present a threat; they are by definition foreign, alien, ‘other’. Anarchists, terrorists, foreign spies – yes, immigrant groups have traditionally contained these too, and the Churchill government in summer 1940, fearful lest there might be some lurking among the ‘Hitler émigrés’, infamously ‘collared the lot’, interning artists and architects, musicians and mathematicians, filmmakers and physicists on the Isle of Man and elsewhere.³⁰

In Britain, ambivalence towards the ‘other’, the outsider, runs deep. I suspect that it always has – particularly ambivalence towards the continent. On the one hand, the traditional panorama of British history tends to highlight this country’s insular independence from the continent, how Britain has never been successfully invaded since 1066, how we beat off the Armada, Napoleon and Hitler. But when it comes to ‘culture’ – well, the British always thought Europe rather good at this. Think of the continental scholars at the court of Henry VII, or the Venetian musicians – or Holbein – at that of his son Henry VIII. Think of Rubens, Van Dyck or Handel. In the eighteenth century, no gentleman was considered properly educated unless he spoke French and had undertaken the Grand Tour; in the nineteenth and into the twentieth, any British musician worth his salt had to study in Germany, any decent artist needed exposure to Paris.

The story of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ can be seen as, among other things, one chapter in that long story of British ambivalence towards arrivals from the continent – similar, in a way, to the story of the Huguenots who fled Louis XIV and came to Britain in the late seventeenth century: some in

²⁹ The most recent book about the Children’s Transports is M. J. Harris and D. Oppenheimer, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* (2000). The most substantial recent study of British policy towards the refugees from Nazism is L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews* (Cambridge, 2003).

³⁰ The first important book on internment was F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (1940; repr. 1988). More recent studies include P. Gillman and L. Gillman, ‘Collar the Lot!’ *How Britain Interned and Expelled its Wartime Refugees* (1980); and R. Stent, *A Battered Page: the Internment of ‘His Majesty’s Most Loyal Enemy Aliens’* (1980). One of the most vivid descriptions of internment is in an essay, originally for *The New Yorker*, by the biochemist and Nobel laureate Max Perutz, most recently reproduced as ‘Enemy alien’ in his collection *I Wish I’d Made You Angrier Earlier* (Oxford, 1998).

Britain were hostile, questioning the wisdom of letting them in; but in retrospect we can see that the new arrivals added greatly to the cultural mix which we have inherited. The Huguenot contribution is now very well known – thanks in part to the efforts of people like Irene Scouloudi. As for the ‘Hitler émigrés’, I think we can say that, by mixing their labours with what they found when they got here, they helped to professionalize aspects of our cultural life. Consider, for example, the transformation of art history from a genteel, Sunday-afternoon pursuit seventy or eighty years ago, preoccupied with questions of aesthetics and connoisseurship, to the highly professionalized academic subject of today, as pioneered by Gombrich and his colleagues at the Warburg Institute. Or the somewhat amateur atmosphere at the Royal Opera House that upset Georg Solti when he arrived as music director and which he swore he would eradicate. At his first press conference, Solti said he’d turn the place into the finest opera house in the world – which I think it was by the time he left in 1971.³¹

In addition, the presence of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ helped to cosmopolitanize the still somewhat insular culture of Britain, acting as a bridge between British cultural life and that of resurgent continental Europe. Nikolaus Pevsner introduced the ideas of Gropius and the Bauhaus to a generation raised on Tudorbethan revival and the Garden City ideal, while Martin Esslin at the B.B.C. introduced the work of central European playwrights to British audiences. George Weidenfeld strove to bring a truly international perspective to his publishing list. ‘I always saw myself as somebody who bridges and who straddles worlds’, he told me proudly, someone at home everywhere – although not, perhaps, completely rooted anywhere. When George talks about ‘we’, Weidenfeld’s friends would joke, you never quite know if he means the British, the Europeans, the Jews or the whole of humanity!

In some ways ‘Hitler émigrés’ were an unusual group of asylum seekers. Many were from educated, well connected (and reasonably moneyed) middle- or upper-middle-class families, not, by and large, the huddled masses yearning to be free. But, like many groups of migrants before and

³¹ Solti thought so, too (see his autobiography, *Solti on Solti: a Memoir* (1997), p. 157). For the supposed amateurishness he found when he arrived, see p. 152. For Solti’s incomprehension at ‘English ways’, see J. Tooley, *In House: Covent Garden – 50 Years of Opera and Ballet* (1999), p. 26. Sir Georg Solti was far from being the only central European émigré to rail at what he saw as English amateurishness. Nikolaus Pevsner pronounced that ‘the amateur [was] altogether characteristic of England’, a country that has produced ‘a nice crop of amateur painters from maiden aunts to Prime Ministers’ (N. Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (1997 edn.), p. 80). Geoffrey Elton condemned the amateur historian for finding the past, or parts of it, ‘quaint’, while the professional, quite incapable of this, ‘lives in it as a contemporary . . . equipped with immunity, hindsight and arrogant superiority’ (G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (1969 edn.), p. 30). George Weidenfeld, noting that he and his partner Nigel Nicolson both lacked business training when setting up their publishing firm, said that he ‘considered it a regrettable shortcoming [while] Nigel was secretly proud of it’ (Weidenfeld, p. 125).

since, they did want to do whatever they could for their country of adoption. I have heard countless touching stories of people who, having found refuge in Britain, made Herculean efforts to become as British as possible: to hide their foreign accent and speak good English, roll their umbrellas, eat porridge and put milk instead of lemon in their tea, and learn to love ‘cricket’. One man waited years to get British naturalization. Finally, his papers came through – and he promptly burst into tears. ‘But why now of all times are you crying?’, his friend asked. ‘I know I should be happy’, blubbed the new British citizen; ‘I am crying because – why did we have to lose India!’³²

Fifty or sixty years ago, many émigrés found that they could comfortably doff one nationhood and enthusiastically embrace another. Nowadays – partly because of the very extremes of nationalism associated with Nazism – earnest expressions of patriotism have become unfashionable, at least in Britain. People tend to emphasize not what unites but what differentiates them. Region, religion, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age bracket – these are nowadays asserted, with accompanying demands for appropriate respect and cultural provision. Today, as people tell you they are black or Asian, Welsh or Scottish, straight, gay or lesbian, senior citizens or single-parent welfare claimants, it almost seems that there are as many *Britains* as there are *Britons*. Thus, many of the more recent arrivals to these shores identify more closely with the culture they and their parents have come from rather than that they have come to. It would be wrong to blame them if they are less inclined than the ‘Hitler émigrés’ of the nineteen-thirties to identify themselves as ‘British’; this is no longer the fashion. But if the ‘Hitler émigrés’ made a contribution to the life and culture of their new homeland, this was undoubtedly eased by the fact that most tried to identify with its values, speak its language and subscribe to its civic structures and traditions.

Today, history has moved on. I have two children in their mid twenties, and they are not particularly interested in the legacy of Expressionist film or Modernist architecture, the paintings of Kokoschka or the essays of Koestler. Why should they be? They and their contemporaries live in a twenty-first-century world of Brit-art, post-modernism, computer graphics, Afro-Caribbean influences and World Music. And I do not want to suggest that the contribution of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ was the be-all and the end-all of the immensely rich and varied cultural world of nineteen-fifties

³² I first encountered a version of this frequently-repeated story in P. Tábori, *The Anatomy of Exile: a Semantic and Historical Study* (1972). Not everyone went so far as to weep on becoming British. But consider the contribution of Alexander Korda to his new homeland. The Hungarian-born film producer named his company ‘London Films’, adopted Big Ben as his trademark and placed a couple of conspicuous union flags outside the main entrance. Korda went on to produce a string of self-consciously ‘British’ feature films, such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, *The Drum*, *Elephant Boy*, *The Four Feathers* and *That Hamilton Woman*, became close to Churchill (and is believed to have done intelligence work for him in the U.S.A.) and was later knighted (see K. Kulik, *Alexander Korda: the Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1990)).

and sixties Britain in which I was raised. Of course it was not. I was brought up in a world of Laurence Olivier and Peters Brook and Hall, of Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten, of Francis Bacon and Henry Moore, of John Wain, John Braine and Kingsley Amis.

So I do not want to exaggerate. But the work of the ‘Hitler émigrés’, and the way it intermixed with what was already here, did provide an important part of that world. And I am glad to think that it has been caught (as it were) when it was. Thirty years ago, it would have been impossible to have undertaken a book like *The Hitler Emigrés*. Most of the people I have written about were in mid-career, and would not have reflected on their lives and work as candidly as they were to do later. Thirty years hence, of course, the story will have gone. Indeed, many of those I interviewed have since died. Today the story of the ‘Hitler émigrés’ is moving from memory into history.

And I do not want to suggest false analogies with today’s asylum seekers. The bedraggled beggars on our streets from Bosnia, Baghdad or Bucharest are not filling a labour shortage as did the Caribbean arrivals in the nineteen-fifties, nor do most of them have the educational accomplishments of the ‘Hitler émigrés’. But who knows what they and their descendants might contribute to life in a thriving, multicultural Britain as the past and present yield to the unchartable future? If there is one thing about our new era of which we can be reasonably certain, it is that growing world population, allied to increasingly cheap and accessible means of communication and transportation, will stimulate ever larger movements of people across national boundaries.

So: the Nazis and the war; Jews and Jewishness; and immigration and asylum. Three topics, all of which have risen once again to the very top of the agenda. In the first place, our world, in the aftermath of the attacks of ‘9/11’, and subsequently on centres of Western activity and enterprise around the globe, is faced once again with forces apparently as destructive in their avowed intent as Nazism. Second, the very nature of Jewishness and Jewish identity is once more being urgently questioned, re-examined, re-defined, in both Israel and the Diaspora – partly in response to a resurgence of virulent anti-Semitism. And third, new waves of migrants are seeking asylum, in Britain and elsewhere, fleeing oppressive regimes and anxious about the kind of reception they will receive from ambivalent governments and a frequently antipathetic press and public. The topics are of course interconnected – and worldwide in their implications. So they were sixty-five years ago.

As we gradually adjust to the hatreds, fears, anxieties and opportunities of our strange new twenty-first century, therefore, we might do well to ponder once again the startling silver linings that can encircle even the darkest historical clouds. In particular, the cultural enrichment from which Britain benefited thanks to migrations of the past such as the

Huguenots who fled Louis XIV in the eighteenth century – and the ‘Hitler émigrés’ admitted into Britain in the twentieth. And of course this is not just a British story. In 2002 I went on a two-month, round-the-world lecture tour. Everywhere, people told me about émigrés from Nazism who had brought their gifts to this or that particular city, region or nation. Indeed, it is one of the great ironies of history that Hitler, by trying to stamp out a cosmopolitan culture that he abhorred, succeeded in the long run in bringing it to the entire world.

So I would like to end with a quotation not from a Briton but from an American. In addition to providing refuge for such great luminaries as Einstein, Brecht, Thomas Mann and Schoenberg, the United States also became home to many of the most distinguished artists who fled from Nazism: painters like Marc Chagall, Max Ernst and George Grosz, art historians of the calibre of Erwin Panofsky, and virtually all the great figures from the Bauhaus. In the nineteen-thirties, the director of the New York Institute of Art was Walter Cook. Apparently, he used to enjoy going up to people and saying: ‘Hitler is my best friend: he shakes the tree – and I collect the apples!’³³

³³ Walter Cook is quoted in the epilogue (‘Impressions of a transplanted European’) of E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (1st edn., 1955; 1993), p. 380.